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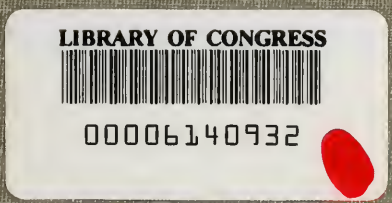

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With Respects of the Author

THE NATIONAL CRISIS,

A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

FIRST REF. PROT. DUTCH CHURCH,

Schenectady, April 28, 1861,

BY

REV. E. E. SEELYE, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

Schenectady, N. Y.

E. NOTT SCHERMERHORN, PRINTER.

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To the Rev. Edward E. Seelye, D. D, Pastor of First Ref. Dutch Church, Schenectady.

Rev. Dear Sir :—

The undersigned members of your Church and parish having listened with deep interest to your views on the present condition of our national affairs, as embodied in your sermon on Sunday, the 28th inst., respectfully solicit a copy of same for publication.

Simon C. Groot,
Otis Smith,
W. Van Vranken,
Ernestus Putnam,
J. B. Graham,
C. Yates,
H. W. V. Clute,
Daniel Vedder,
C. F. Hoag,
Abm. Vrooman,
Thos. H. Reeves,
Nicholas Cain,
N. Swits,
E. Rosa.

Schenectady, April 29, 1861.

To Mr. S. C. Groot and others :

Gentlemen :—Your polite note, requesting me to furnish for publication the sermon I preached yesterday, on the present crisis, is received.

Although written hastily and without the remotest view to such an end, yet if, in your judgment, it can conduce in any degree to promote a noble christian patriotism, and subserve the cause of our beloved country, I cheerfully submit it to your disposal.

Very respectfully yours.

E. E. SEELYE.

SERMON.

—o—

2 Samuel x: 12.

Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of ou God: and the Lord do that which seemeth Him good.

It is a sad and stern necessity which calls upon the ministers of peace to speak of war. As Christians, and as men we feel an instinctive recoil from the dreadful subject; and were we able, we would gladly shut our eyes and turn away from the painful events which hourly startle us.

But it is utterly impossible to ignore them. It is vain to attempt to keep silence concerning them.—The condition of our unhappy land awakens the anxious solicitude of every member of our communities. All day long we talk of it: it haunts our dreams through the troubled night.

At length the political conflicts which have long agitated our nation, have culminated in deliberate violence and bloodshed. The angry cloud, so long hovering in the Southern sky, has burst in fury and disgorged its stormy magazines of wrath. The authority of our Federal Government has been defied; rebellion has reared its bloody standard, and treason has put on "the horrid front of war." That glorious old flag of the Union, whose Stars and Stripes have

so long waved in peace—that symbol of freedom and hope, under whose folds the American citizen has rested in safety upon the fartherest shores, and in the strangest lands—that flag, so glorious in peace and terrible in war, has been trampled under foot upon our own soil, by the men whom it has sheltered from their cradles, and who have solemnly sworn to defend it with their lives. For two days a handful of brave men in a beleagured fortress, upheld it in the face of thousands of enemies; till wearied out under the fire of their destructive batteries, our national standard was lowered before the flag of rebellion.—The very Capitol of the nation is endangered, and hostile armies are marshaling to overthrow it.

In this emergency the proclamation of the President has gone forth, summoning the loyal people of the land to arms! And though it be a terrible thing to contemplate, yet I know of no grander, sublimer spectacle in human affairs, than the prompt, the universal response of the Northern millions to this call. Like a slumbering giant suddenly aroused, the nation has sprung to its feet and rushed to arms. Party differences and political animosities have been swept like the chaff of the threshing floor. The ploughman has left the furrow. The smith heard the tocsin, and dropped his hammer upon his anvil. Young men fly from the desk and the counter, from the office and the factory, from the shop and the fireside, and hurry to the rendezvous. Daily we hear the shrill fife and the stirring drum—daily the cry is 'to arms!' Fond mothers clasp their sons in agonizing

sorrow, and with bedimmed eyes and fervent prayers to Heaven, bid them go to their country's call.—Fathers kiss their children, and with a hurried "good-bye" exchange their quiet homes for the soldier's ranks. All know the cause. The Chief Magistrate of the nation has proclaimed that our Federal Union was imperiled, and asked the people to rally for its defense. Twenty millions of freemen stand up to-day and answer—IT SHALL BE DONE.

It is useless for me to come here to-day, and affect to pass over in silence, the events which crowd upon us. Even while the Sabbath's light smiles around us, and the hallowed walls of the sanctuary inclose us, we strive in vain to withdraw our thoughts from the thrilling scenes of the hour. We will not try to do it. As patriots and as christians, it becomes us now, in this house of God, to ask what is our duty, and where is our hope?

We can find no more appropriate words to bring to you to-day, than the animating appeal of Joab to the armies of Israel, when they stood in array against the allied powers of Ammon and Syria, and carried the war to the gates of their foes. "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the Lord do that which seemeth good in His sight."

The crisis of our country repeats to us the stirring exhortation, "Be of good courage, let up play the men."

True courage is a noble virtue, a most important element of Christian character. It is a sentiment

far removed, and easily distinguished from a blind recklessness of danger—a savage, ferocious violence which is stirred into fury by the volcanic bursts of passion. It has its foundation in the convictions of duty, and can measure danger in its fearful reality, with a stern unyielding fortitude. It looks the threatening emergency full in the face, it surveys its dimensions with a cool and steady eye, and prepares to meet it, whatever be the consequences.

I rejoice to discover, what I believe to be, this genuine courage, developing its power in the universal uprising of American freemen during the past week. There has been indeed a wonderful enthusiasm—a wide-spread excitement among the masses. But, as I pass through the seething crowds, I find no one who rejoices in the strife. Thousands have rushed to arms, but it is not because our people, long used to the arts of peace, have been suddenly transformed into ruffians eager for the strife. No. If I have not mistaken utterly the temper of the people, there is but one universal feeling of deep sorrow—one anxious, earnest desire to avoid, if possible, the shedding of blood.

But back of this and deeper still, I read their stern and fell determination, at all hazards, to sustain this government, and vindicate the Constitution. He who calculates that this mighty uprising of the past week is but an ephemeral burst of bravery—a sudden paroxysm of excitement, which will soon subside and vanish like the mist, will find that he has failed to interpret aright the phenomenon before him. The

men who have mustered to arms and are mustering still, understand the mission they are undertaking. The people are serious, thoughtful, and in earnest—none seem disposed to trifle, none affect to laugh. Regiments march through some of our large cities in silence, no drum need beat to keep their courage up.

This true courage, founded on a sense of duty and a conviction of the right, is the sterling virtue which the times demand. Because it is cool, deliberate, forbearing, not a few Southern Hotspurs have been taught to speak of us as a race of cowards. But wo betide the day when they try the real temper of our people on the battle field. It is this rational courage which is reluctant to strike, and will not strike without a cause to strike for, which we need to cherish now, that we may "play the men for our people and the cities of our God."

I remark also, that such courage well becomes us now, for we are not driven to despair. I admit that our position is a trying one, but we are not lost as a nation. They who are in rebellion against the Constitution, are by far inferior in numbers and resources to ourselves. That divided North—of which Secessionists have dreamed so long and hoped so much—is gone! The people of the free States to-day are a unit, more by far than were the people of the Colonies in seventeen hundred and seventy-six. Thank God! we are a nation still! We have a Government to-day! The old flag of the Union and the Constitution is the flag the people have determined shall

wave aloft over this land. I am not indifferent to the seriousness of the crisis. I know that the path immediately before us looks dim and gloomy. I fear that the shock of battle, the thunder of artillery and the blood-stained ground, may signal the pathway over which those Stars and Stripes shall move; but they shall move from the Potomac to the Gulf. I do not despair of the Republic! In the darkest days of ancient Rome, when Hannibal, with his Carthaginian legions, had slain her Consuls and routed her last army on the bloody field of Canna, and was thundering at her gates—at that time the Roman Questor sold in the Forum, at public auction, and at high price, the very spot of ground outside the walls on which the conqueror was encamped. So, my countrymen, let us look with hope beyond the present tumult and distress. Let us have faith in our glorious Union to stand the shocks of revolution, and let us move with firm and cheerful confidence towards the future of our history.

I have spoken of that courage which our times demands, and which will enable us to play the men for our people, as something more than a mere spirit of bravery and contempt of danger. It is a noble moral sentiment. In its highest form it is fidelity to God and humble dependence upon His arm. Would we then put on our armor in this hour of danger, with such a courage, we need most of all to behold God's uplifted hand in these dangers, to confess with penitence our sins, to entreat His pardoning mercy, and to supplicate His blessing. God, the Most High, is

dealing in judgment with us for our iniquities as a people. We have provoked Jehovah to jealousy, and He has turned His face away from us in anger.

I need not refer at this time to the vices and crimes practiced in all our communities,—vices for which the individual is alone responsible,—for it is more appropriate for me to speak of those public sins, which are justly chargable to us as a people.—It is fearfully true that in our national and political life, we have persistently disregarded the Lord our God. How has corruption long grown rank in our high places! How have truth and righteousness become so far banished from the arena of politics, that the conscientious christian man, who fears his God and will not descend to the falsehood and artifice and low demagogueism of party; nor buy men's votes with money, as one would cattle in the market-place—such a man is well nigh ostracized from public office. Public virtue has been debauched. Who does not know that bribery, wholesale peculation, perjury and punic faith, are familiar words every day charged upon multitudes in public life? Who seeks to conceal the fact that men reeking in vice, have been promoted to our halls of legislation, or have been chosen to places upon the benches of justice? O, does not truth compel me to declare, that drunkenness, debauchery, gambling, Sabbath breaking, spoilation and kindred crimes, have blackened the characters of too many men, who have received the suffrages of the people. And tell me, are the people guiltless, while such things are patent and

known to all? While there is a God in Heaven, shall a people expect to go on thus and escape his severest judgments? "Shall not I visit for these things?" saith the Lord Almighty. While quietness and security reigned, the public conscience slumbered. But it cannot slumber now, for the visitations of divine displeasure are now upon us; our long security is disturbed, the tide of national prosperity has been checked, and we are tossed to-day amidst the heavings of revolution. O, is not the voice of God lifted up above the tumult to-day, calling us to repentance? What duty is more imperative at this hour, than for us to come before our God with true humility, to confess our grievous sins with unfeigned contrition, and entreat Him to return to us with His favour and forgiveness? Say not, that it will dampen our courage to bow before our God. It is *guilt* that will make cowards of us all, and that burden must be taken away, if we would play the men for our people and the cities of our God. In all the troubles of the times, I hear the voice of God calling for a reformation among us. Repent, ye people, if ye would escape His severer strokes. Ye who know how to pray, should wait earnestly at the throne of grace, that Jehovah would forgive and save us. In ancient times, when the war note rang through the tribes of Israel, the people flocked to Shiloh to ask counsel of Jehovah, before they set the battle in array against the foe.

Let us to-day imitate their example! Let us be assured that no better preparation for the present

crisis can be secured, than for our people to come with humble prayer before Him—to confess our sins and commit our country's cause to His almighty care. This done, we can take the field against rebellion, and in the name of the Lord set up our banner.

Again. If we would be of good courage, it is of the highest importance that we clearly understand and deeply feel the righteousness of the cause for which we struggle. In this land we take up arms as freemen. We do not muster as the blind myrmidons of a despot, or as the unthinking irresponsible machines of which armies have been so often composed.

Our people in this land see and feel the momentousness of the issue, and can appeal to the God of holiness, for the justice of their cause. It is nothing less than the very existence of our nation, *as a nation.* It is the question whether we are, or are not, a mere assemblage of peoples without a national life or unity. It is the question, whether for nearly a century, we have been playing a stupendous farce before the world, and living and acting under the miserable delusion that we were a nation, bound together by one supreme organic law, while we were merely a copartnership of communities, each independent of the other. It comes to this according to the fatal heresy behind which treason skulks to-day.

The doctrine of Southern secession, is national suicide. To admit it—to allow States to leave the Federal Union on that basis—is to proclaim the jubilee of anarchy, the millennium of barbarism. This every man sees and feels. The premises and

the conclusion are near together—so near that no keen dialectics or profound investigations are needed to discover them. The masses see them, they understand them.

I do not wonder that before such a question as this, all other issues sink out of sight, like lead in the ocean's depths. I do not see how the madness and infatuation of those who have rebelled against the Government could be exhibited in a more glaring manner, than in this extreme form in which they have chosen to stake the controversy. On all the old issues they could ask us to come and reason together. On all those questions arising out of, and connected with the institution of slavery—its rights under the Constitution—how and where it might seek for extension in the territories, and what should be the policy of the Federal Government towards it—on all such questions, the South might claim a hearing, and rely upon friends in the North to speak for them.

But now the scene is changed. Without waiting for a single hostile act, on the part of the government, against their rights, they have bid defiance to the Constitution. They have declared, by their acts, that we are not a nation and never have been. They have fired upon our flag. If ever war was justifiable—if ever a nation could stand uncovered before the God of battles and appeal to His almighty arm to give victory to the right, then I solemnly believe that we may, in this hour, challenge Heaven upon our side. Our revolutionary sires fought for a holy

cause, but ours is holier. Had they failed in their long struggle for independence, they still might have returned to their loyalty, and as colonies of the Mother Country, advanced in wealth and power.

But if we fail in sustaining our Federal Union now, while rebels are in arms to overthrow it, where can we go? What will be these States, but lost Pleiads—plunging into chaos and night? For us to fail in this tremendous crisis is national death and social anarchy. Never! no, never can this nation make terms with *this* rebellion. All see this fact. All party lines are obliterated here, and the millions of the North stand in solid phalanx and appeal to the Almighty for the righteousness of their cause. The cause is one which every patriot can feel it worth while to die for. It is one which every Christian can plead for, before his Redeemer and his God. It is one which every minister of Jesus Christ can carry with him to the pulpit and advocate it with the same voice with which he proclaims the wonders of redemption. Viewing this to be the position of our people in this crisis, may we not say with a noble enthusiasm, "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people and for the cities of our God."

Again. To the deep conviction of the equity of our cause, I may add that the duty of our people in unsheathing the sword, is strengthened by the kind forbearance of the Federal Government, under the most persistent provocations. For months the note of rebellion has rung through the South. Federal forts, arsenals, custom houses, and treasures have

been seized by violence. Government officials have been driven from their posts. The supreme law of the land has been defied, and a rival Confederacy has arrogated its legitimate authority.

But during all these events, the Federal Government refrained from striking a blow. The nation watched with patience the progress of events, and hoped for a peaceful settlement of the controversy, but the only effect of this peaceful policy has been to embolden our adversaries and to provoke assault. Our inaction was called weakness; our deep reluctance to war, was construed into cowardice—our forbearance, into fear. At length all disguise was thrown off, and the work of civil war inaugurated at Charleston, where thousands of chivalrous foes opened their rebel batteries upon the walls of Sumter, defended by seventy brave men; till after two days incessant fire, the flag of our Union was lowered before its enemies.

Until that time the mighty North refused to move. Not a spear or shield was seen among her tribes; but the tidings of that assault dissipated all hopes of peace. The deep bomb of those guns in Charleston harbor, has reverberated among the granite hills of New Hampshire, along the shores of the Great Lakes, beyond the Mississippi, across the broad prairies of the West, and their echoes linger still among our Northern mountains, calling freemen to the field. Henceforth forbearance became impossible. The Chief Magistrate of the Nation issued his proclamation for men, and the people are now in arms.

No calm observer of the progress of events can say, that we have been hasty and eager for the fray. The freemen of the North are not thirsting for blood. I know of no one who prefers war to peace. All would have rejoiced to have escaped the conflict, but it has come; and with stern inexorable purpose, the people have risen in their might, and have sworn to defend this government with their treasures and their lives! Our armies are mustering to the field. We stand to-day face to face with the grim and solemn reality—WAR!

What are the particular duties which this crisis urges upon us?

First—The people are bound to answer promptly to the call *for men.* Mere loquacious patriotism is not what is wanted in this hour. Let those who are of suitable age and able to bear arms, enter their names upon the muster roll. Let none refuse, without a reason, which they will not be ashamed to give. Let the response be so universal that the question to be settled will be, not, who shall go? but who will stay at home? I believe it will be so throughout our States. Let not our city be behind others in furnishing her quota of true men.

Secondly—We must be prepared to sustain the most vigorous policy of the Government, and second the most thorough and extended plans of operation. If we would save the effusion of blood, if we would shorten the fearful struggle, if we would conquer an enduring peace, we must smite this rebellion with a giant arm! No half-way measures will suffice. No

feeble treatment will cure the malignant cancer. Surgery! terrible surgery is demanded to cut deep around its roots, and probe it to the bottom. This is not cruelty but kindness. Philanthropy demands it—patriotism and liberty demand it. Now is the time to settle the great questions of national rights and constitutional freedom, within this Union, in such a way that the grim spectres of secession and treason shall not rise upon our graves, and shake their marrowless bones and gory locks in the faces of our posterity.

Thirdly—It is our immediate duty to provide liberally for the wants of the families of those who have gone to fight our battles. Such families have a noble claim upon us which we must cheerfully acknowledge. The soldier in his distant encampment when he thinks of home, must be told to feel, that while he is bivouacing around his camp fires, his wife and little ones far away, are not forgotten, but kind eyes and friendly hands are watching over them. Our contributions should be free and liberal for this purpose. Our Volunteer Relief Committees should be furnished with the means to supply the wants of every soldier's household. No Peter's pence collection should be the measure of our patriotism, but according to our individual means, let us be ready for every appeal for help.

Fourthly—As Christian men having done all to stand, and play the men for our people, let us be constant and earnest in our supplications, that the God of justice and of might will give victory to our

cause. While we send forth our sons and brethren to the field, let our prayers and benedictions daily follow them. Let us not boast too much of our physical prowess, or our material resources. For the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. In God alone is our help, in this hour of trial, and while we salute our flag and cheer on our noble Volunteers, let us after all, turn to the Lord our God who is our sun and our shield. The deeper our convictions are, of the righteousness of our cause, the more earnestly and boldly should we carry it in our hearts to God.

Pray then for our brethren already in arms. They have gone from our cities, towns and villages. Some from our own community, some from this very sanctuary, at the first call of duty and of danger. They have gone to defend the Union and the Constitution, to preserve our dearest rights, our most sacred liberties. They have gone to breast the shock of battle where the Stars and Stripes must go, to shed their blood if needs be, and to offer up their lives upon the altar of their Country. Pray for them. May the God of battles spare them from the ravages of disease, and be a shield to them in the field of combat. May His banner be over them and inspire them with a noble courage, which disdains to fly before the foe. May His divine spirit lead them to a true and humble confidence in Him, and faith in the merits of Jesus Christ, His Son, that should they fall, they may die at the post of duty and be meet for Heaven. Let us pray for those who are at the head of

this Government, and to whom are now committed the weightiest responsibilities. Our Chief Magistrate and his associates should be remembered by our people in their prayers, that God would endue them with all that wisdom, prudence, energy and decision which will fit them to play the men in this hour of danger. They need to-day the hearty and unwavering support of every loyal citizen. Let us then rebuke every sinister attempt to spread abroad, distrust and doubt among the people. Let us feel a confidence in the Government, and pray that God would bless our rulers. And especially let us thank Him, that He has spared to our Country, that veteran Chieftain whose experienced counsels now direct our military movements—that old Hero who has so long led our armies on from victory to victory, and who by his deep laid strategy, and unerring forecast, his cool unshaken courage, and accurate execution, has proved himself the greatest General of the age,—God bless and strengthen him! May he live to see the day when the old flag shall wave again in glorious peace over this whole nation!

It is our duty also, as a christian people, to pray for those who are in arms against us. Not that God would favour their nefarious schemes, or prosper their traitorous enterprises. But we can and should beseech Him that he would dispel the delusion which is upon them, and reveal to them their fatal error, —that He, who hath in his hands the hearts of all men, would turn their hearts from their evil purposes, that he would calm the stormy sea of passion,

awaken their relentings, and lead them back to loyalty and obedience.

O, let us guard our feelings with a double diligence, in a time like the present. Let not the high souled emotions of patriotism be mingled with the bitterness of private revenge. Let us beware lest the blade which we unsheath, as the sword of justice, become forged into the dagger of malice and fiendish hate. Let us pray for our enemies, that they may be converted into friends.

And having conscientiously endeavored to know our duty, and be prepared to meet it at every sacrifice, let us calmly repeat the concluding words of Israel's valiant Chieftain, "and the Lord do that which seemeth him good."

A devout recognition of God's overruling Providence, in continually disposing of human events and determining their results, is peculiarly befitting to us, in our present circumstances. The Most High ruleth in Heaven and on Earth, "He changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth Kings and seteth up Kings." "He increaseth the nations and destroyeth them." Do all we can, in marshalling the mighty men, and multiplying our resources, our destines are in His hands. Christian patriotism and courage fall back and rest on his Almighty arm, saying when duty is done, "and the Lord do that which seemeth him good." Such a sentiment should inspire the hearts of our people in this crisis. That swaggering bravery, which cowards glory in—which vents its fiery valor in huge curses and terrific oaths

and boasts when it puts on its armour, more than when it puts it off, may disdain such language, and sneer at it as cant. But christian heroes use it, and with Joab, the old scared veteran of Israel's hosts, say "The Lord do that which seemeth him good."

This language is creature-like and becoming, for it is the language of felt dependence, of trust and humble confidence in the Almighty. It is the language of acquiesence in His will. It is the language of conscious satisfaction that we have sought to know our duty and have done all we could, whatever may betide us. It is the language of submissive hope, gazing with a steady eye through the thickening gloom, and catching rays of brightness in the horoscope of futurity. With this sentiment filling our hearts, we rally around the Stars and Stripes, for duty, and commit our country and our liberties —our children's heritage and our national destiny, to God! "And the Lord do that which seemeth him good."

I cannot close without directing your thoughts to the last peaceful refuge of the pious, from all the dark and tumultuous agitations of this life. Amidst all the revolutions of State, the overturnings of Empires, and the decay of human governments, there is one Kingdom which cannot be moved. It is the Kingdom of God! Its throne is in the heavens. Its reign is in the hearts of all of God's redeemed people. Treason cannot endanger it. Fleets and armies cannot destroy it. Here is our last asylum from a troubled world. "Therefore will not we fear,

though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." Whatever be the fate of our country and her proud institutions, we are invited to take refuge in this Kingdom and secure a citizenship in Heaven. Let us listen then to the embassy of grace which comes to us in the Gospel; and by true repentance and faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour, return to our allegiance to our Father, God. Then, when all that we hold dear on earth is lost, our souls may rest in heaven. Then, when we die, whether on the battle field amidst the charge of squadrons and the thunders of artillery, or in the tranquil hour of summer twilight surrounded by all the gentle offices of long affection and loved associations of home—wherever ourspirits take their flight from Earth, we gain the victory, and win a crown of glory which fadeth not away.

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WERT
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